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SUBJECT: Varied Reactions to Bombings in Casablanca

REF: A) CASABLANCA 000079

B) CASABLANCA 000064

C) 06 CASABLANCA 000409

Classified By: Principal Officer Douglas C. Greene for Reasons 1.4  
(b), (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Nearly six weeks after the first in a series of suicide bombings that shook Casablanca, residents of the city are still grasping for explanations. Finding themselves at a loss for answers, many citizens are reacting to the recent explosions at the U.S. Consulate and privately-run American Language Center with either detachment or concern. In any case, security in the city, both official and private, has increased markedly, and many Moroccans, somewhat uncharacteristically, are more willing to take an active role in helping authorities to find terrorists. End Summary.

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Just a Bunch of Crazy Guys  
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12. (U) The series of suicide bombings that took place in Casablanca on March 11, April 10, and April 14 have left residents wondering how to come to terms with the terrorism in their midst. One reaction is nonchalance. When asked for his perspective a few days after two explosions occurred near the U.S. Consulate and the privately-run American Language Center, a salesman at a sporting goods store remarked, "It's nothing." He went on to explain that the perpetrators of these attacks are not true Moroccans or Muslims, and can be dismissed as part of an anomalous, marginal group without larger ill intentions. A Moroccan woman who lives one block from the Consulate expressed the same sentiment, saying she thinks the bombings are "not a big deal" and the bombers are "just a bunch of crazy guys." These same responses were repeated time and again by other Moroccans asked similar questions.

13. (U) Others try to downplay recent events by underscoring reports that no link has been found between Morocco's recent suicide bombers and Al Qaeda or, more specifically, the Al Qaeda in the Maghreb group that claimed responsibility for the April 11 bomb attack in neighboring Algiers. According to this line of thinking, Morocco's terrorists are amateurs who use rudimentary explosives and have deliberately avoided killing large numbers of people. (To date, six suicide bombers and one policeman have died from the explosions and one bomber was shot by police before he had the opportunity to detonate the device he was wearing).

14. (U) Some Moroccans buy into media reports that the police have

captured the terrorists involved, preempting any further attacks. A guard at Dar America said police had done a stellar job and had the situation "wrapped up." He optimistically projected that the U.S. Consulate and Dar America staff would return to work a week following the latest attacks as a result. Even Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa, who has been publicly frank about the on-going terrorist threat, said recently that the two terrorist groups behind the spate of bombings have been "totally dismantled." While such comments encourage a sense of calm, they also promote denial of terrorism's potential scope in Morocco.

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Or, a Reason to be Scared  
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15. (U) At the same time that some find ways to rationalize recent suicide bombings in Casablanca, others are fearful and refuse to dismiss terrorist activity as a passing phase. Some Casablangans express newfound fears and admit to altering patterns in their everyday life due to the possibility of additional attacks. Consequently, merchants in the tony shopping district of Maarif, not far from the site of the most recent bombings, have noted a considerable drop in business. Caf owners and taxi drivers agree, noting that business, especially in the evening, has decreased significantly. "People are going home earlier," one cab driver reported, "because there just seems to be more aggression on the street." Not only small businesses are suffering. According to one well-connected, international businessman, his Casablanca colleagues report a decrease in overall business of up to forty-five percent. On a positive note, however, he said they expect things to bounce back quickly if there are no additional attacks in the area.

16. (SBU) While some have hopes of a quick rebound to normalcy, others are proceeding cautiously. Casablanca's three American schools have instituted strict new security measures and cut numerous activities and events. They are not the only schools to react with concern. One Moroccan contact reported that the events in Casablanca have reached far beyond the city itself. The bombings, he claimed, made him consider closing the small American school he recently established in Agadir. "At first, I just thought it was too dangerous for the American teachers working there," he said. "Then, I realized that what we teach here--the American ideals of democracy and tolerance--is too important to give up, even now." He added, however, that he is still nervous about the school and fearful for his family members in Casablanca.

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Suspicion and Concern  
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17. (SBU) Until the April 14 attacks, the bombings in Casablanca were confined to non-elite neighborhoods in the city, leaving those living in wealthier areas feeling somewhat secure. That situation has now changed. It is no longer simply those who live in low-income areas who move about with apprehension and keep a close eye on their neighbors. Anyone carrying a parcel on a bus or in a crowded taxi is under suspicion.

18. (SBU) Culturally, Moroccans rarely insert themselves in events outside their personal sphere. This cultural norm seems to have changed in light of events beginning March 11. Since that time, we have heard numerous reports from Moroccans about bearded strangers entering cafes, only to have regular patrons question the owner about his familiarity with the person. Some are even suspicious of those they do know. One pharmacist chuckled as she recounted the story of a clinic security guard who patted down a familiar local guard because he was "acting spacey" and wearing a bulky sweater that could have been hiding explosives.

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Security Situation  
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19. (U) On the streets of Casablanca, private security guards can be found posted outside nearly every restaurant, shop, and bar. For many of these establishments, this measure is new. For others, it is a practice resurrected from the May 16, 2003 attacks. Other businesses with security measures in place before the bombings have

stepped up their vigilance in recent days. Some businesses check bags, have guard dogs, and/or restrict access by blocking multiple entrances, forcing clients to file through a single door. McDonald's restaurants throughout Casablanca have added car checks at parking lot entrances.

¶10. (SBU) The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has also stepped up security measures throughout the city. The MOI force auxiliaire, an unarmed security force trained for riot and crowd control, is now deployed on the major streets and boulevards of Casablanca to reinforce the police presence. In addition, this week the MOI announced that Casablanca's police force will be immediately increased by 2000 officers, with another 2700 to be hired and trained this summer.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: Casablanicans are receiving mixed messages about the threat of terrorism in Morocco. On the one hand, they are being told that arrests have been made, the situation is under control, and life should return to normal. On the other hand, the government remains on high alert and continues to hunt for terrorists throughout the country. People remain suspicious and on edge, fearful of what may lay ahead. In this atmosphere, a new, large-scale attack, especially in tourist destinations such as Marrakesh and Agadir, could damage the Moroccan economy, as well as drive home the message that Moroccans are no longer immune to terrorism on their own soil. End Comment.

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